

NEW YORK TIMES
19 MAY 1976

Johnson and Nixon Linked To Spying C.I.A. Opposed

WASHINGTON, May 18 (AP)—Presidents Johnson and Nixon applied pressure on the Central Intelligence Agency that brought about a domestic spy operation that the agency's director, Richard Helms, knew violated its charter, according to a Senate intelligence committee staff report.

Operation Chaos, designed to uncover the foreign influence behind domestic unrest, lasted from 1967 to 1974 despite repeated findings that student and racial demonstrations at home were not directed or financed from abroad, the report aided.

At its peak, Operation Chaos carried the names of 300,000 Americans in a computerized index and maintained separate files on some 7,500 citizens, according to the report released today. Information in the files included intelligence on domestic political activity gathered from electronic eavesdropping, mail opening, undercover agents and Federal Bureau of Investigation reports, the staff study said.

As an example of the scope of the Chaos, the report cited the C.I.A.'s request to the National Security Agency for material picked on up from international phone calls and telegrams "regardless of how innocuous the information may appear."

'Step Toward Secret Police'

The staff report called the operation's gathering of information on domestic political activity "a step toward the dangers of a domestic secret police."

"Operation Chaos was not an intelligence mission sought by the C.I.A.," the report stressed. Presidents Johnson and Nixon pressed Mr. Helms, then the director, to determine the extent of hostile foreign influence on domestic unrest, and the agency's repeated negative findings only led to pressure for a more thorough investigation, according to the report.

In February 1969, Mr. Helms sent a written warning "to Henry Kissinger for President Nixon" that "this is an area not within the charter of this agency, so I need not emphasize how extremely sensitive this makes the [report on student unrest]. Should anyone learn of its existence, it would prove most embarrassing for all concerned."

The C.I.A. charter bars it from internal security functions.

The 52-page document, which disclosed few new details about Operation Chaos, provided extensive descriptions of three related projects—Merrimack, Resistance and Project 2.

Persons Followed Home

Merrimack "began in 1967 as an effort to infiltrate dissident groups in Washington, D.C., to obtain advance information about demonstrations against C.I.A. facilities, the report said. It said that the projects, using construction workers and trade-union members as part-time agents, was gradually expanded to include "any information about the plans and attitudes" of such groups as the Women Strike for Peace, the Washington Peace Center, the Congress of Racial Equality and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

In some instances, photographs were taken and persons were followed to their homes, the report said. Merrimack, which by the C.I.A.'s own testimony exceeded the agency's legitimate security interests,

lasted until September 1970.

Resistance, which lasted from 1967 to 1973, "compiled information about radical groups around the country, particularly on campuses," the report said.

The project developed some 600 to 700 files consisting mainly of newspaper clippings but also including "information from confidential sources in the local community such as campus officials and police authorities," according to the report.

Project 2 began in 1970 as a separate operation in which agents entered American universities in preparation for undercover assignments abroad, the report said.

"While preparing for their future assignments, they provided considerable information on their associates, dissident organizations, demonstration plans and sometimes personal information," the report said.